



GENERAL BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

Victorville, CA
Southern California Logistics Centre
Lot 19

Prepared for:

Stirling Development
27422 Portola Parkway, Suite 300
Foothill Ranch, CA 92610
(949) 462-0909

Prepared by:

RCA Associates, Inc.
15555 Main Street #D4-235
Hesperia, CA 92345
(760) 596-0017



117-00028

175 FINANCE ST

Notes

Notes

THE PLAN AND LOT MERGER TO ALLOW FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AN APPROXIMATELY 975,000 SQ.
SPECULATIVE INDUSTRIAL BUILDING ON A 44.8

| <u>Original Date</u> | <u>Submittal Date</u> | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 8/14/17 | 8/15/2017 | 0459-041-20 |

Project No. RCA #2017-23
March 21, 2017



TITLE PAGE

Date Report Written: March 21, 2017

Date Field Work Completed: March 21, 2017

Report Title: General Biological Resources Assessment

Prepared for: Stirling Development
27422 Portola Parkway, Suite 300
Foothill Ranch, CA 92610

Principal Investigators: Randall C. Arnold, Jr., Senior Biologist
Parker L. Smith, Biological Field Technician

Contact Information: Randall C. Arnold, Jr.
RCA Associates Inc.
15555 Main Street, #D4-235
Hesperia, CA 92345
(760) 596-0017
rca123@aol.com
www.rcaassociatesllc.com

Table of Contents

| Section | Page |
|--|-------------|
| 1.0 Introduction and Project Description | 1 |
| 2.0 Existing Conditions | 2 |
| 3.0 Methodologies | 4 |
| 4.0 Literature Search | 7 |
| 5.0 Results | 8 |
| 5.1 General Biological Resources | 8 |
| 5.2 Federal and State Listed Species | 9 |
| 5.3 Wildlife Species of Concern and Sensitive Plants | 10 |
| 6.0 Impacts and Mitigation Measures | 11 |
| 6.1 General Biological Resources | 11 |
| 6.2 Federal and State Listed Species and Species of Special Concern | 11 |
| 7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations | 12 |
| 8.0 Bibliography | 13 |
| Certification | 15 |
| Appendix A – Tables and Figures | |

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Biological surveys were conducted on March 21, 2017 on an 47-acre parcel (approximate) located south of Phantom East and west of Nevada Avenue in the City of Victorville, California (Township 6 North, Range 5 West, Section 26, USGS Victorville, California Quadrangle, 1956) (Appendix A: Figures 1, 2, and 3). As part of the environmental process, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) data sources were reviewed.

Following the data review, surveys were performed on the site during which the biological resources on the property and in the surrounding areas were documented by biologists from RCA Associates, Inc. As part of the surveys, the property site and the adjoining lands were evaluated for the presence of native habitats which could potentially support populations of sensitive wildlife species. Focused surveys were also conducted for the burrowing owl and a habitat assessment was performed for the Mohave ground squirrel and (desert tortoise). The property was also evaluated for the presence of sensitive habitats including wetlands, vernal pools, riparian habitats, and jurisdictional areas.

Based on data from USFWS, CDFW, and a search of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB, 2017), there are five sensitive species that have been documented in the region within approximately five miles of the project site. Sensitive wildlife species include desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), Mohave ground squirrel (*Xerospermophilus mohavensis*), Le Conte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*), and Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*). Scientific nomenclature for this report is based on the following references: Hickman (1993), Munz (1974), Stebbins (2003), Sibley (2000) and Whitaker (1980). Table 4-1 provides information on the various special status plants and animal species which occur in the area. The project proponent is proposing to construct an industrial project on the property. The site appears to have been cleared of most of its native vegetation, and currently supports a disturbed Mediterranean grassland community.

2.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The property is approximately 47-acres in size and is located south of Phantom East and west of Nevada Avenue. The site is surrounded by industrial developments to the north and west, with residential developments (abandoned) bordering the site to the south and east (Appendix A: Figures 1 and 2).

The site supports a relatively sparse density of vegetation Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), bur-sage (*Ambrosia dumosa*), and erodium (*Erodium texanum*) (Figure 3). The site appears to have been cleared of vegetation within the last few decades; although, re-vegetation has occurred through some of the area. Additional plants observed include creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), matchweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), schismus (*Schismus barbatus*), and brome grasses (*Bromus* sp.). Table 1 provides a list of all plants occurring on the site and in the immediate surrounding area.

The site is not expected to support a large variety of wildlife species on the site, and only a few species were observed during the field investigations. Mammals observed on the site or which are expected to inhabit the site include jackrabbits (*Lepus californicus*), desert cottontails (*Sylvilagus auduboni*), California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*), and Merriam's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys auduboni*). Coyotes (*Canis latrans*), which are very common in the region may also traverse the site during hunting activities.

Birds observed included ravens (*Corvus corax*), and sage sparrow (*Amphispiza bellii*). No reptiles were observed during the surveys; however, species know to be common in the area and which are expected to inhabit the site include desert spiny lizard (*Sceloporus magister*), side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), western whiptail lizard (*Cnemidophorus tigris*), and Mohave rattlesnake (*Crotalus cerastes*). Table 2 provides a compendium of wildlife species. No sensitive habitats (e.g., wetlands, vernal pools, critical habitats for sensitive species, etc.) were observed on the site during the field investigations.

3.0 METHODOLOGIES

General biological surveys were conducted in March 2017 during which biologists from RCA Associates, Inc. initially walked meandering transects throughout the site to collect data on the plant and wildlife communities. Following completion of the initial reconnaissance survey, comprehensive surveys were performed throughout the site to document the vegetation present on the property and the wildlife species which inhabit the area. In addition to the general biological investigations, focused surveys were conducted for the burrowing owl and a habitat assessment was also performed for the Mohave ground squirrel and desert tortoise. The applicable methodologies for the various field investigations performed are summarized below.

Surveys were performed on the site and in the surrounding area from about 1000 to 1230 hours on March 21, 2017 for the desert tortoise and burrowing owl. Weather conditions during the surveys consisted of winds 0 to 5 mph, temperatures from 60(°F) to 70(°F) with cloud cover ranging from 70 to 80 percent. All plants and wildlife detected during the field investigations were recorded and are provided in Tables 1 & 2 along with other species that have been documented in the area (Appendix A).

General Plant and Animal Surveys: Meandering transects were walked throughout the site and in the surrounding area (i.e., zone of influence) at a pace that allowed for careful documentation of the plant and animal present on the site. All plants observed were identified in the field and wildlife were identified through visual observations and/or by vocalizations. Tables 1 and 2 (Appendix A) provide a comprehensive compendium of the various plant and animal species observed during the field investigations.

Desert Tortoise Desert Tortoise: A habitat assessment was conducted on the site for the desert tortoises and a survey was also performed for the presence of any potential tortoise burrows by biologists from RCA Associates, Inc. Ten meter, parallel belt transects were walked in an east-west direction until the entire property had been checked for any tortoise sign (burrows, tracks, scats, etc.). Surveys in the zone of influence (ZOI) were also conducted in the area north, south, and east of the site.

USFWS and CDFW specify when protocol surveys for tortoises should be conducted (i.e., April through May and September through October). This 47-acre site exceeds the acreage allocation for focused surveys; therefore, protocol surveys were not conducted within the appropriate time frame. However, comprehensive field investigations were conducted throughout the site during the biological surveys and no tortoise sign was identified on the site or zone of influence.

During the various biological survey, all transects were walked at a pace that allowed careful observations along the transect routes and in the immediate vicinity. Field notes were recorded regarding native plant assemblages, wildlife sign, and human affects in order to determine the presence or absence of suitable tortoise foraging habitat. If tortoises are found to inhabit the site in the future, a Section 10(a) incidental take permit from the USFWS and a Section 2081 permit from CDFW will be required to mitigate for impacts to the species.

Burrowing Owl: A habitat assessment was conducted for the burrowing owl in conjunction with the general biological surveys to determine if the site supports suitable habitat for the species. Following completion of the habitat assessment, it was determined that the site does support suitable habitat for the burrowing owl. Therefore, a focused survey was conducted for burrowing owls and for the presence of occupiable (i.e., suitable) burrows which could potentially be utilized by owls. As part of the burrow survey, transects were walked throughout the site during which any suitable burrows were evaluated for owls and owl sign. Burrowing owls typically utilize burrows which have been excavated by other animals (squirrels, coyotes, foxes, dogs, etc.) since owls cannot dig their own burrows. CDFW protocol also requires surveys be conducted in the surrounding area out to a distance of about 500 feet; therefore, zone of influence (ZOI) surveys were performed in the areas north and west of the site. If present on a site, CDFW typically requires the owls to be passively relocated during the non-breeding season.

Mohave Ground Squirrel: A habitat assessment was performed for the Mohave ground squirrel as per CDFW protocol including an analysis of the on-site habitat, evaluation of local populations, and assessment of connectivity with habitats in the surrounding area which might support populations of the Mohave ground squirrel. If a site supports suitable habitat for the Mohave ground squirrel, CDFW will require payment of a mitigation fee for acquisition of mitigation lands to compensate for impacts to the species. In lieu of payment of mitigation fees, the proponent may choose to conduct a live-trapping survey to definitively determine the presence/absence following consultations with CDFW.

4.0 LITERATURE SEARCH

As part of the environmental process, a search of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB, 2017) was performed. Based on this review, it was determined that five special status species have been documented within approximately 10 miles of the property. The following tables provide data on each special status species which has been documented in the area.

Table 4-1: Federal and State Listed Species and State Species of Special Concern.

T = Threatened; E = Endangered; SSC = Species of special concern; CNDDDB = California Natural Diversity Data Base

| Name | Listing Status | Habitat Requirements | Presence/Absence | Comments |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Desert tortoise (<i>Gopherus agassizii</i>) | Fed: T State: T | Desert scrub | Site is located within the known distribution of the species. Focused surveys conducted on site did not identify any tortoises. | Nearest documented observation within 5 miles southeast of the site (CNDDDB, 2017). |
| Burrowing owl (<i>Athene cunicularia</i>) | Fed: None State: None | Grasslands and desert habitats | Two occupied owl burrows observed on the site and five unoccupied burrows noted. | Nearest documented observations within 3 miles east of the site (CNDDDB, 2017). |
| Mohave ground squirrel (<i>Xerospermophilus mohavensis</i>) | Fed: None State: T | Desert scrub | Site supports suitable habitat for the specie. Species has been identified In area; therefore, species may inhabit the site | Nearest documented observations within 2 miles northwest of the site (CNDDDB, 2017). |
| Swainson's Hawk(<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>) | Fed: None State: T | Dense riparian vegetation. | Site does not support suitable habitat for the species. | Nearest documented observations within 2 miles east of the site (CNDDDB, 2017). |
| Le Conte's thrasher (<i>Toxostoma lecontei</i>) | Fed: None State: None | Desert scrub | Site does support suitable habitat for the species; however, no thrashers observed during field surveys. | Nearest documented observations within one mile northeast of the site (CNDDDB, 2017). |

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 General Biological Resources

The site supports a moderately disturbed Mediterranean grassland community which covers most of the property; although, the density of vegetation is somewhat low on most of the site due to past shrub clearing activities. Species present on the site included Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), burrobush (*Ambrosia dumosa*) and erodium (*Erodium texanum*) (Figure 3). Other plants noted during the field investigations included creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), matchweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), schismus (*Schismus barbatus*), and brome grasses (*Bromus* sp.). Table 1 provides a compendium of all plants occurring on the site and/or in the immediate surrounding area.

Wildlife species typically found in association with creosote bush, and which were observed included jackrabbits (*Lepus californicus*), desert cottontails (*Sylvilagus auduboni*), California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*), and Merriam's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys auduboni*). Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) may also traverse the site based on the presence of scats throughout the property. Birds observed included ravens (*Corvus corax*), and sage sparrow (*Amphispiza bellii*).

No reptiles were observed during the March 2017 surveys; however, species common in the region which are expected to inhabit the site include desert spiny lizard (*Sceloporus magister*), side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), western whiptail lizard (*Cnemidophorus tigris*), and Mohave rattlesnake (*Crotalus cerastes*). Table 2 provides a compendium of wildlife species observed during the various surveys and those likely to occur in the area. No sensitive habitats (e.g., wetlands, vernal pools, critical habitats for sensitive species, etc.) were observed on the site during the field investigations.

5.2 Federal and State Listed Species

Mohave Ground Squirrel: Mohave ground squirrel populations have been documented in the area, and the nearest observation was recorded in 2011 about 5 miles northwest of the property (CNDDDB, 2017). No Mohave ground squirrels were observed during field investigations; however, the vacant land to the east of the site does provide suitable habitat for the species. The majority of the site, as previously discussed, was cleared of most its native vegetation. Some re-vegetation has occurred, although, it is the opinion of RCA Associates, Inc. that the habitat is not prime Mohave ground squirrel habitat. Based on the analysis conducted by RCA Associates, Inc., the property could potentially support populations of the species based on the following criteria.

1. Presence of native vegetation east of the site, typically associated with the species;
2. Connectivity with suitable habitat in the surrounding area;
3. Presence of numerous small mammal burrows which may be utilized by the species; and
4. Presence of documented observations in the general region.

Desert Tortoise: Desert Tortoise have been documented in the area, and the nearest observation was recorded in 2007 about 3 miles northwest of the property (CNDDDB, 2017). Although the site does support some vegetation associated with the species, the site is not expected to support population of the species given the absence of any tortoise sign (e.g., scats, burrows, tracks, etc.) as documented during the field investigations conducted by RCA Associates, Inc.

Swainson's Hawk: Swainson's hawk has been observed in the area, with the nearest occurrence approximately 2 miles from the site (CNDDDB, 2017). The species is occasionally observed in the area hunting for its primary prey (e.g., small mammals). The species could utilize the site for hunting; although, the species is expected to infrequently use the site for hunting.

5.3 Wildlife Species of Special Concern and Special Status Plants

Burrowing Owl: Eight owl colonies that have been observed in the region, with the nearest observation about 3 miles north of the site. This sighting was recorded in 2007 (CNDDDB, 2017). The focused survey for owls did not detect and owls, owl burrows, or any other sign of the species (e.g., casting, whitewash, etc.). Therefore, the site is not expected to support any burrowing owls at the present time.

Le Conte's Thrasher: Le Conte's thrashers have been documented in the region, with the most recent observation in 1986 about one mile northeast of the property. Thrasher's could potentially occur on the site; although, the use of the site by thrashers may be very infrequent given the low population levels in the region as well as the lack of any recent sightings according to the CNDDDB.

6.0 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

6.1 General Biological Resources

Future development of the site will impact the general biological resources present on the site, and most of the vegetation will likely be removed during future construction activities. Wildlife will also be impacted by development activities and those species with limited mobility (i.e., small mammals and reptiles) will experience increases in mortality during the construction phase. However, more mobile species (i.e., birds, large mammals) will be displaced into adjacent areas and will likely experience minimal impacts. Therefore, loss of about 47-acres of sparse desert vegetation is not expected to have a significant cumulative impact on the overall biological resources in the region given the presence of similar habitat throughout the surrounding desert region.

6.2 Federal and State Listed and Species of Special Concern

No federal or State listed species were observed on the site during the field investigations including the Mohave ground squirrel, desert tortoise, or Swainson's hawk. In addition, there are no documented observations of these species either on the site or in the immediate area. The site is not expected to support populations of the desert tortoise based on the absence of any tortoise sign (e.g., burrows, scats, tracks, etc.), and although suitable habitat is present on site, the probability of the species inhabiting the site is very low. As noted above, Swainson's hawks may infrequently occur over the site during hunting forays; although, the species is not expected to use the site for nesting activities given the absence of suitable nesting trees.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed project is not expected to have a significant impact on any special status species based on the March 2017 surveys; furthermore, loss of about 47-acres of sparse desert scrub habitat is not expected to be a significant cumulative impact given the presence of this community throughout the Mojave Desert. In addition, loss of this habitat is not expected to have a significant impact on wildlife which may inhabit the site or on those species which may infrequently traverse the site. If any special status wildlife species are observed on the property during future development activities, CDFW and USFWS (as applicable) should be contacted to discuss specific mitigation measures which may be required for the individual species. CDFW and USFWS are the only agencies which can grant authorization for the “take” of any sensitive species.

- Hickman, James C.
The Jepson Manual Higher Plants of California. University of California Press. Berkeley, CA.
3rd Edition. 1996.
- Jaeger, Edmund C.
1969. Desert Wild Flowers. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California. 321 pp.
- Kays, R. W. & Wildson, D. E.
Mammals of North America. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 2002.
- Munz, Philip A.
1974. A Flora of Southern California. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.
1086 pp.
- Sibley, David Allen.
National Audubon Society. The Sibley guide to Birds. Alfred A Knopf, Inc. 2000.
- Stebbins, Robert C.
A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians. Houghton Mifflin Company.
2003.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2010 Desert Tortoise Survey Protocol.
- Whitaker, John O.
The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mammals. Alfred A Knopf, Inc. 1980.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits, present the data and information required for this biological evaluation, and that the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. Field work conducted for this assessment was performed by me or other biologists under my direct supervision. I certify that I have not signed a non-disclosure or consultant confidentiality agreement with the project applicant or applicant's representative and that I have no financial interest in the project.

Date: 03/21/2017 Signed: *Randy Arnold*
Report Author

Field Work Performed By: Randall Arnold
Senior Biologist

Field Work Performed By: Parker Smith
Biological Field Technician

Field Work Performed By: Heidi Coduto
Field Technician

Appendix A
Tables and Figures

Table 1 - Plants observed on the site and known to occur in the immediate surrounding area.

| Common Name | Scientific Name | Location |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Creosote bush | <i>Larrea tridentate</i> | On Site & Surrounding area |
| Brome grass | <i>Bromus sp.</i> | “ |
| Schismus | <i>Schismus barbatus</i> | “ |
| Brome grass | <i>Bromus sp.</i> | “ |
| Yellow-green matchweed | <i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i> | “ |
| Burrobush | <i>Ambrosia dumosa</i> | “ |
| Fiddleneck | <i>Amsinckia tessellata</i> | “ |
| Rabbitbrush | <i>Chrysothamnus nauseosus</i> | “ |
| Vinegar-weed | <i>Lessingia lemmonii</i> | “ |
| Mustard | <i>Descurainia pinnata</i> | “ |
| Cholla | <i>Opuntia echinocarpa</i> | “ |
| Filaree | <i>Erodium cicutarium</i> | “ |

Note: The above list is not intended to be a comprehensive list of every plant which may occur on the site or in the zone of influence.

Table 2 - Wildlife observed on the site during the field investigations.

| Common Name | Scientific Name | Location |
|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Common raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | On-site and in the surrounding area. |
| California ground squirrel | <i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i> | “ |
| Sage sparrow | <i>Amphispiza belli</i> | “ |
| Mourning dove | <i>Zenaida macroura</i> | May occur on site |
| Cactus wren | <i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i> | “ |
| Gambel's quail | <i>Callipepla californicus</i> | “ |
| Horned lark | <i>Eremophila alpestris</i> | “ |
| Western flycatcher | <i>Tyrannus verticalis</i> | “ |
| Western whiptail lizard | <i>Cnemidophorus tigris</i> | “ |
| Side-blotched lizard | <i>Uta stansburiana</i> | “ |
| Desert spiny lizard | <i>Sceloporus magister</i> | “ |
| Antelope ground squirrel | <i>Ammospermophilus leucurus</i> | “ |
| Desert cottontail | <i>Sylvilagus auduboni</i> | “ |
| Jackrabbit | <i>Lepus Californicus</i> | “ |
| Coyotes | <i>Canis latrans</i> | “ |

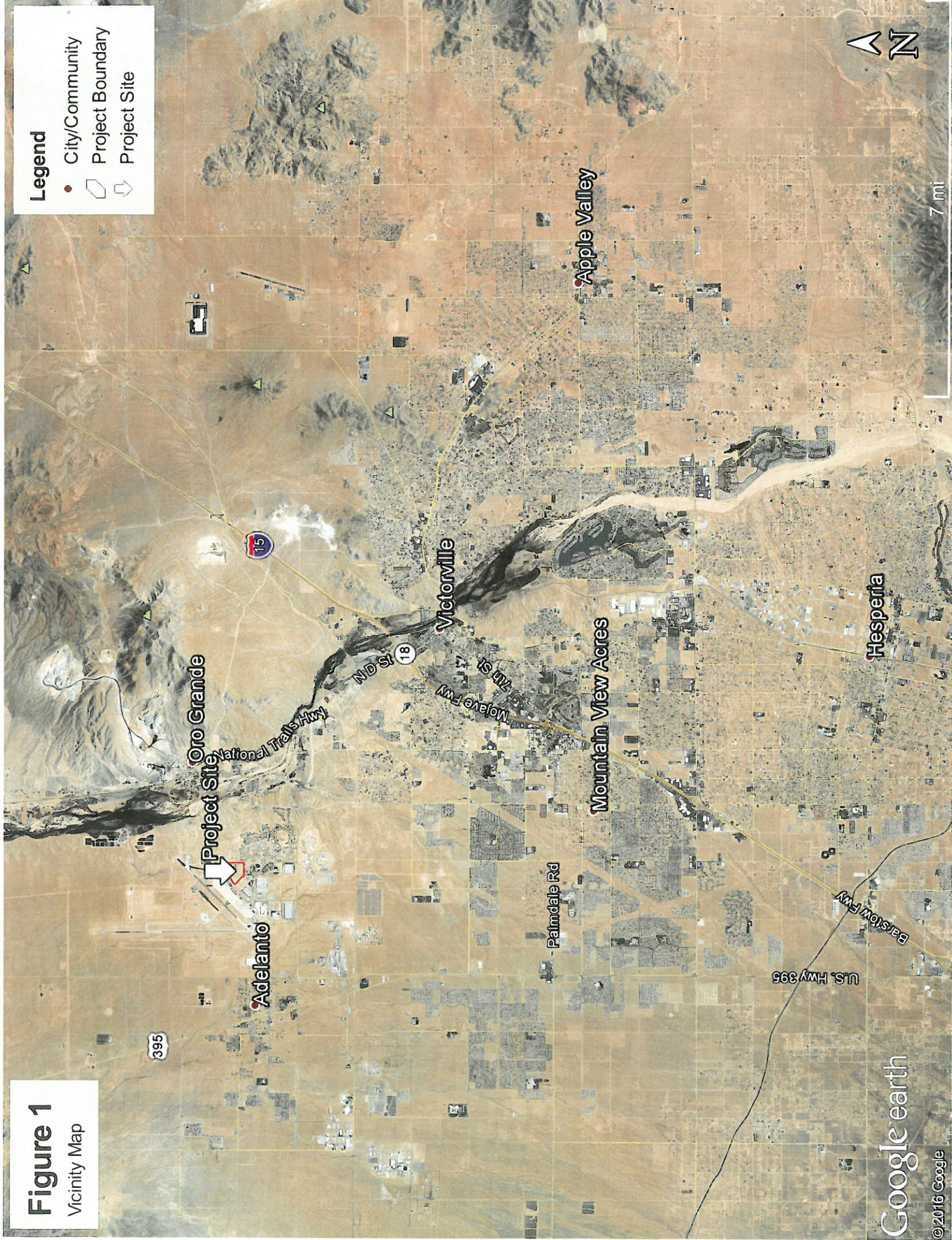
Note: The above Table is not a comprehensive list of every animal species which may occur in the area, but is a list of those common species which were identified on the site or which have been observed in the region by biologists from RCA Associates, Inc.

Figure 1

Vicinity Map

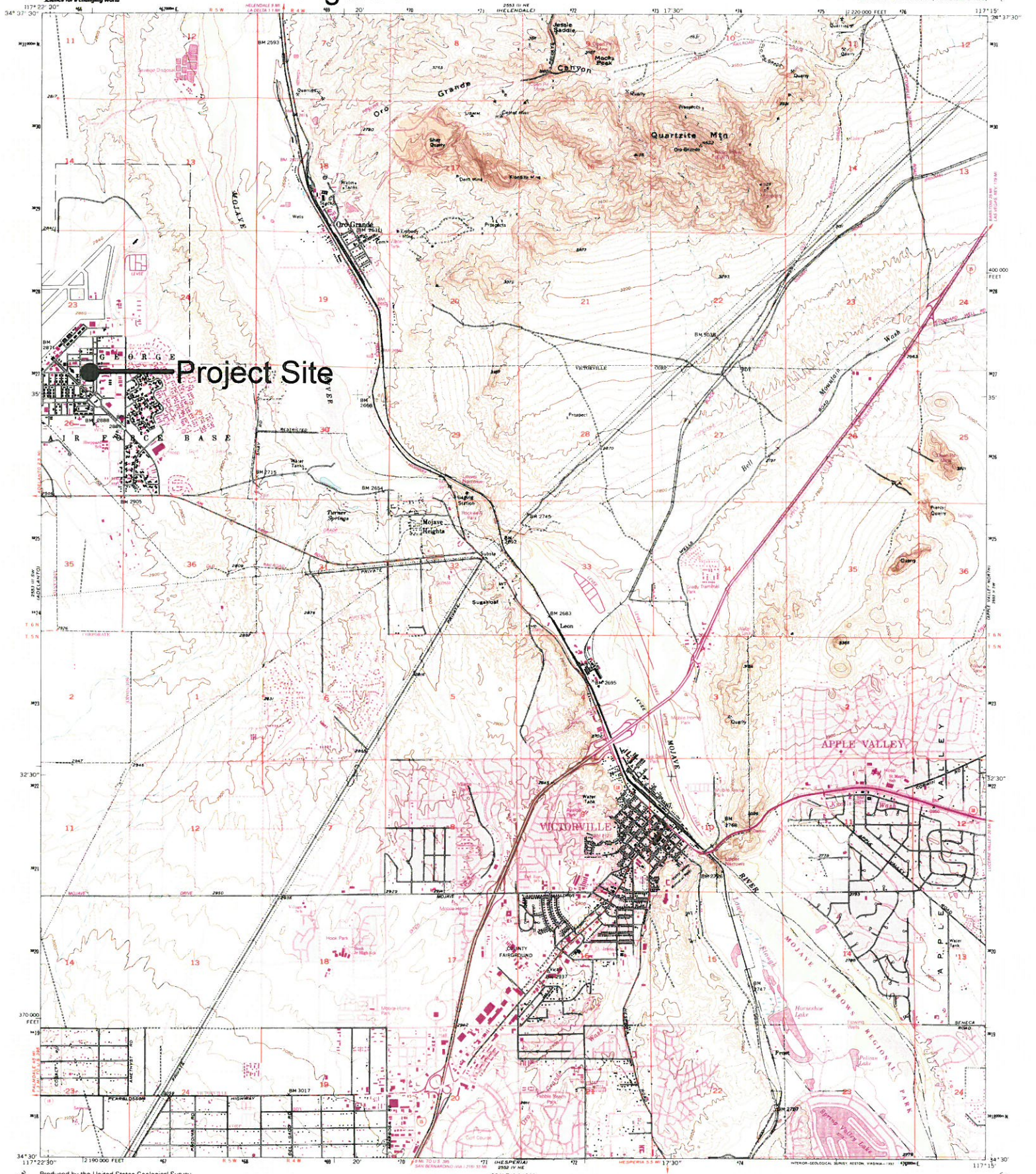
Legend

- City/Community
- Project Boundary
- Project Site



Google earth

© 2016 Google



CENTER LOOKING NORTH



CENTER LOOKING EAST



FIGURE 3
SITE PHOTOS

CENTER LOOKING SOUTH



CENTER LOOKING WEST



FIGURE 3 Cont.
SITE PHOTOS